

A Review of Tesl Methods

By John Parsons

In the past 40 years there have been many changes in the field of Teaching English As a Second Language (Tesl). Great changes have occurred in the purposes for Tesl. Along with these, there have also been changes in the ways of teaching English. Today's teacher is faced with the task of choosing from a plethora of methods, the method that he/she feels is best. In the following pages the different methods now available will be described and commented upon.

TRADITIONAL METHODS

Grammar-Translation

This is, perhaps, the oldest method used in teaching foreign languages. It stems from the traditional methods used in teaching Latin and Greek. Although many feel it is outdated, many facets of it are still widely used today.

Its basic aim is to teach students how to read a text in a second language and translate it into the student's native language. The texts are usually chosen for the purpose of illustrating a grammar point and introducing new vocabulary.

Usually a lesson begins with an explanation of a grammar point in the student's native language. New vocabulary is also defined in the native language. After reading the text, the student proceeds by doing exercises which are designed to help the student master the new grammar rules and vocabulary. Among the exercises are ones

in translating from the second language to the student's native language and vice versa. These translation exercises are designed to show the degree of mastery the student has achieved with different grammar rules and are not particularly designed to help the student communicate any of his own ideas or emotions.

One objection to this method is that it makes no attempt to teach students how to converse. Even after many years of study students will probably be unable to converse with native speakers of the second language.

A second objection is that it fails even to help students learn to read. When native speakers read, they often anticipate meaning from the context of the text. In the Grammar-Translation method, students are forced to concentrate upon the application of particular grammar rules and trying to translate word for word. Thus, it is argued, the use of this method interferes in the student's developing proper reading habits.

As a result of these objections, the Grammar-Translation method is widely condemned by most modern authorities. Despite this, facets of this method are still used in many Test classrooms. Perhaps this is because both students and teachers are comfortable with it since it has the sanction of tradition.

DIRECT METHOD

The Direct Method arose at the end of the nineteenth century. Its aims and techniques are quite different from those of the Grammar-Translation method.

It proposes that the student should learn a second language in the same way that a child does, that is, through imitating and interacting with speakers of the language. Students should learn to understand the language "directly" and not through explanation in the student's native language.

Thus, in the classroom, the students are expected to inductively

learn grammar and vocabulary through context, or by the teacher's use of gestures, actions, pictures, and objects. Much stress is also put on the correct pronunciation of words. Many facets of this method are today used in commercial language schools like Berlitz.

However,, in using this method it has been found that students easily misunderstand the meaning of what the teacher has said. Also at later points of development, when the students try to evolve from merely imitating the teacher, they make many mistakes which show interference from their native languages.

READING METHOD

In 1924 the Modern Foreign Language Study was organized to study American language teaching. In 1929 a report authored by Algernon Coleman showed that the typical American student studied a foreign language for only a two-year period in either high school or college. Coleman, therefore, concluded that for this two-year period the only practical objective was to develop reading skills through the "reading method."

Unlike the Grammar-Translation method, translation was not the focus of the method. Instead, students were to be taught to read for comprehension. Students spent most of their class hours orally reading from a carefully graded series of readers in which vocabulary was slowly introduced and frequently repeated. Exams were based on trying to determine the student's ability to comprehend instead of determining the ability to translate.

LINGUISTIC METHODS

With the advent of World War II, the American military found it necessary to develop a method to intensively teach large numbers of students. Structural linguists and cultural anthropologists who were working within the same theoretical framework were assembled

to help develop the necessary methodology.

ARMY SPECIALIZED TRAINING PROGRAM

The basic principles of this great collusion were propounded in a pamphlet written by Leonard Bloomfield, *Outline Guide for the Practical Study of Foreign Languages*. These were as follows :

1. "Language is speech, not writing." The primary task of the student is to learn to speak. The student must therefore study the language based on the way it is spoken by a native speaker and not the written form of the language. Reading is a different matter.

In order to achieve the goal of acquiring speech, the student imitates a native speaker who models basic sentences and dialogues. To make this task easier, words were written with a special spelling.

2. "A language is a set of habits." Native speakers, when they speak, do not contemplate about the different grammar rules or other elements of their language. In order to do the same, the student must memorize and continually practice basic sentences until their use becomes natural to him. This is called mimicry-memorization, or "mim-men."
3. "Teach the language, not about the language." Grammar rules are to be taught so as to help the student develop an ability to speak with language. It is not necessary for the student to explain why a particular usage is correct. He only needs to master the ability to use it correctly.
4. "Languages are different." Since each language is unique, the student must study a foreign language without reference to another language. The use of translation is opposed because it gives practice in incorrect usage.

The departure from the principles of traditional methodology, especially Grammar-Translation, that these principles evince are ob-

vious. The basic object of the Grammar-Translation method is to teach reading through the use of translation. In the new methodology now propounded by the linguists, the basic object is to master speech.

The Differences in this new method and that of the Direct Method uses actions and gestures to teach the meaning of words and sentences without making use of the student's native language. The new developed by the linguists evolves from the principle that a language is "a system of oral symbols with an internal structure."¹⁾ The student must internalize this system.

ORAL APPROACH

The Oral Approach is a linguistic approach to teaching and shares many elements with the Army Specialized Training Program. It was developed by Charles Fries and the staff of the Michigan English Language Institute. Over the years it has exerted great influence on teaching materials and the training of teachers.

The Oral Approach bases itself on the importance of word order in English. It, therefore, stresses the teaching of patterns into which new words or phrases are substituted to make new sentences. This approach differs from that of "mimmem" because the sentences change while the patterns are different. The student is expected to fall into the habit of using the patterns to make sentences instead of concentrating on the basic sentences. The patterns are then made increasingly complex and varied. This approach presumes that the student will not focus on the mechanical side of the patterns but learn to use them unthinkingly.

To teach the patterns, a variety of pattern practice exercises were developed. These soon became quite popular with teachers. Some teachers use them almost exclusively in their classes. This overuse tends to result in almost inane choral chanting.

The second facet of this method is its development of a system in which lines are printed to show intonation. This system is based

on Kenneth Pike's structural analysis of American English intonation.

To further aid in teaching pronunciation, a phonic alphabet is used. To help the student master the correct pronunciation of phonemes which do not exist in his native language, and be able to distinguish them when listening, exercises using minimally contrasting pairs of words have been developed.

Finally, grammatical structures have been ranked according to complexity. The student begins to study English with the simplest patterns and gradually masters increasingly complex patterns.

AUDIO-LINGUAL METHOD

This method began as an attempt to adapt to adapt the experience of the Army's intensive language classes to the conventional academic environment. As such, it has adopted many of the features of the Army Specialized Training Praining Program and the Oral Approach.

The basic principle of this method gives precedence to the teaching of oral skills. Learning can be achieved without using the eyes. A second principle is that learning a language entails the formation of habits through practice.

Some Direct Method influence can be detected in the deemphasis of grammar teaching. Grammar should be absorbed through the use of pattern practices based on those of the Oral Approach.

Typically, a lesson begins with a dialogue containing the structures and vocabulary to be introduced in that lesson. The student is expected to first mimic, and then memorize the dialogue. Following this, the students participate in pattern drills based on the structures introduced in the dialogue. Usually there are four basic types of drill: simple repetition, substitution, transformation and translation.

Presently the Audio-Lihgual Method is not as popular as it had been in the past. It has been criticized on the grounds that many students do not acquire fluency in the second language. With the

development of the views of Noam Chomsky, many elements of the theories on which this method are based have come under attack.

COGNITIVE-CODE LEARNING

In the 1950s, B. F. Skinner tried to apply the findings of Pavlov's experiments to human behavior. One aspect of this attempt was the development of programmed learning and teaching machines. The task of learning a second language was broken down into small steps. To reinforce correct responses, answers were provided immediately. Teaching machines were designed so that students could follow the programs individually without the aid of a teacher.

Initially this approach was adopted with much enthusiasm. It has failed, however, to deliver on its initial promises. This may be due to the lack of interaction necessary in the development of communicative abilities.

NOAM CHOMSKY

In the late 1950s and 1960s, Chomsky postulated theories that challenged the base of structural linguistics and denied that habit was a part of linguistic behavior. Chomsky proposed that language acquisition was an innate human capability that develops almost spontaneously. He also viewed language as "rule governed behavior" and not as a set of habits. With the theoretical base of the Audio-Lingual Method under attack from Chomsky, many new methodological proposals have emerged in recent years.

COGNITIVE-CODE LEARNING

Ironically, cognitive code has many similarities with the largely disparaged Translation-Grammar Method. There are, however, some significant differences.

Since language is "rule governed behavior", it is held that it is necessary for the students to consciously learn the code first. Once the student has a cognitive control of the code, faculty will develop automatically when the language is used in a meaningful situation.

As in Grammar-Translation, lessons begin with an explanation of the grammar rule of the day. This is often done in the student's first language. After the explanation, there are exercises which are designed to help the student consciously practice the rule. Exercises are then followed by activities like dialogues, games, etc. Homework also is usually assigned.

Critics of this method call it a form of Grammar-Translation without translation. It is argued that a knowledge of grammar rules does not automatically lead to an ability to communicate in the second language.

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

This is a theory systematized by Stephen Krashen. It is based on Chomsky's opinion that language acquisition is an innate human capability and on recent psycholinguistic studies of first language acquisition. Acquisition is a process like the way children develop ability in their first language. It is a subconscious process and the result, acquired competence, is also subconscious. It is acquisition which leads to fluency.

The second way is through learning. By this, he means the conscious study of the rules of a language and their correct application.

He then hypothesizes that there is a natural order in the acquisition of grammatical structures. Some structures tend to be acquired early and others tend to be acquired later.

Thirdly, he hypothesizes that formal learning's main function in second language performance is that of acting as a Monitor; that is, it makes changes in utterances after they have been produced by the

acquired system. The Monitor can function if only three conditions are met. The speaker must have sufficient time to think about conscious rules, he must be focused on form, and he must know the rule. Monitor use results in the use of items that are acquired late in the natural order, items that the student has learned but not yet acquired. People who use the Monitor too much tend to be so concerned with correctness that they cannot achieve fluency. Underusers are uninfluenced by error correction and can self-correct only by using their acquired system.

Since acquisition is more basic to fluency than learning, how does acquisition emerge? Kershaw hypothesizes that acquisition occurs when the acquirer understands input at a level higher than his current level of competence. Understanding occurs when "the acquirer is focused on the meaning, and not the form of the message."²⁾ Whenever the acquirer understands the input and there is enough of it, acquisition will occur. Thus, there is no need for rigid syllabi. Furthermore, fluency emerges on its own. It cannot be taught. When the acquirer assimilates enough comprehensible input, he will feel ready to speak. His early speech will be full of errors, but fluency will develop as the acquirer understands more input.

Finally, Krashen hypothesizes the existence of an Affective Filter. Whether one has a high Affective Filter or a low one is related to matters of motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. High motivation, much self-confidence and low levels of anxiety cause low affective filters. A high affective filter prevents input from triggering the language acquisition device, that part of the brain responsible for language acquisition.

Krashen uses these hypotheses to evaluate teaching methods. According to him, to be effective a teacher must provide enough input and help to make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation. Although his theory is not a method in itself, it has been very influential in the development of the Natural Approach.

THE NATURAL APPROACH

This method was developed by Tracy Terrell in conjunction with Krashen's theory. In this method, the instructor always uses the target language and never uses the student's native language. Students respond in either language. If they respond in the second language, errors are not corrected unless communication is seriously hindered. Homework may contain formal grammar exercises for which the teacher corrects mistakes, but there is no formal presentation of grammar in class. In class the teacher employs activities which are designed to involve the students in discussing matters which are of interest to them. Some short dialogues are also provided.

The Natural Approach has been criticized on the grounds that it fails to recognize that children learn their native language under especially favorable conditions that cannot be approximated when learning a second language. The Natural Approach, it is argued, puts an adult into the position of an infant and denies him the opportunity to make use of those advantages that he does enjoy as an adult.

THE SILENT WAY

In the Silent Way, developed by Caleb Gattegno, the teacher talks as little as possible while oral production by the students is maximized. The teacher manipulates a set of colored rods of different lengths in conjunction with the use of a word chart, a phonic chart, drawings, worksheets and books. Initially the charts are used to practice pronouncing words and numerals. Finally, the rods are used to practice speaking. The teacher speaks only in the target language. The students are expected to be able to reproduce new material after only a single exposure to it. The teacher corrects pronunciation when necessary, but for most of the class he only

indicates if what the student says is correct or not.

TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE

This method was developed by James Asher. Basically, the students obey commands that involve a physical response. At first the commands are quite simple, but they gradually become more complex. Students speak only when they are ready. Their first utterances consist of commands which usually begin to decline after 10 hours of instruction. Writing is not taught.

In studies of students taught by this method, high levels of interest and acquisition of listening skills are reported. One wonders, however, how long the interest of the students could be maintained if one were to try to adhere to the requirement of producing imperatives all the time.

COUNSELING LEARNING/COMMUNITY LANGUAGE LEARNING

This method is an application of techniques developed by speech therapists in clinical psychology to the teaching of foreign languages. In Counseling-Learning it is held that the reduction of barriers to interpersonal relations benefits patients more than the acquisition of speaking skills. The therapist tries to develop an environment in which the patients speak with a minimum of reserve and the therapist assists them sympathetically.

In this method, a small number of students sit in a circle with a counselor behind them. It is hoped that a community spirit will develop and the students will be motivated to learn the language in order to communicate with the group and gain acceptance as a member of the group. The students are grouped into one of five stages according to their ability.

In the initial stage, the student first tells the counsellor what he

wants to say using his native language. The counsellor tells the student how to say it and the student repeats it the rest of the class. The counsellor makes corrections in a non-evaluative, non-critical way.

In the next stage, the student tells the counsellor what he wants to say in his native language and then tells the group in the foreign language without waiting for the counsellor to supply the foreign language version. The counsellor assists only when the student makes errors or falters. From the third stage, the student begins to use only the target language. In this stage students are expected to make many mistakes and the counsellor corrects them in a non-evaluative manner. In the fourth and fifth stage, the students are expected to speak freely in the foreign language. The counsellor only joins in to make grammatical or pronunciation corrections.

Although this method should result in a great deal of language acquisition, one wonders how well it could be adapted to the typical second language classroom. Most classes in Japan contain more students than could be practically accommodated by one teacher. There is also the difficulty of finding teachers bilingual enough to use this method effectively.

SUGGESTOPEDIA

Suggestopedia (suggestion plus pedagogy) was developed in Bulgaria by a psychotherapist, Dr. Georgi Lozanov. He contends that people have been conditioned to believe that there are limits to how much they can learn and how fast it can be learned. This conditioning is caused by suggestion and it can be changed by suggestion. He stresses juxtaposing conscious and unconscious stimuli so that the reserves of the whole person can be tapped into.

At the Institute of Suggestology in Sofia, the students are grouped into classes not exceeding twelve persons. The students are all given new names and occupations to reduce inhibitions. The classroom should be attractively decorated with soft lighting. Classes

are held for four hours per day. The first four days are devoted to an intensive course of oral work.

The students do not see the text during this time. After this initial phase, the class is conducted with three phases. In the first phase students review material already covered. This is done through conversations, plays and games. In the second phase, new material is presented in the form of long conversations based on situations with which the students are familiar. The dialogues are read by the teacher three times in three different tones of voice. A translation is provided and the students can also see the dialogues. In the third phase of the lesson, the dialogue is again read by the teacher while the students follow the text and engage in rhythmic breathing. First, the teacher reads the Bulgarian translation and then reads the foreign language selection. While he is reading the foreign language section, the students hold their breath, read the selection and repeat it to themselves mentally. Then the teacher reads the material again while baroque music is played. The students close their eyes and meditate on the text.

Very good results have been reported by those who have tried this method. But limiting classes to twelve students does not seem to be a viable option at this time in Japan. Nor does it seem likely that average students would be able to devote four hours a day to studying a foreign language.

DARTMOUTH INTENSIVE LANGUAGE MODEL

This method has been developed by John Rassias and is commonly referred to as the Rassias method. It takes an approach completely opposite to that of Suggestopedia. In a master class of 22 to 24 students, the students are subject to an assortment of surprises designed to make the learning of a language an existential experience; a ghost appears at the door to ask for protection from the devil, or a telephone rings in a wastepaper basket. After an hour

in the master class the students attend tutorial classes of 6 to 8 Students. Students do pattern drills together orally.

CONCLUSIONS

Twenty years ago, the Audio-Lingual method enjoyed overwhelming preeminence. Today, it has lost much of its former prestige and its adherents are on the defensive. A whole host of different methods have been proposed to supplant the Audio-Lingual method. Many of these methods, while supposedly based on the same principles, propose techniques that seem to be effective to some degree. None has yet proven itself to be significantly more effective than the other methods. The average teacher, then, seems to be faced with selecting a method, or elements of different methods, that best satisfy his own particular situation. Since situations differ from teacher to teacher, and from class to class, the teacher must experiment until he finds what works best for him.

FOOTNOTES

1. Robert Lado, *Teaching English Across Cultures* (New York, 1988), p. 81.
2. Stephen D. Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1987), p. 21.

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